[Klocker]

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“They weren't all Englishmen”, says Charles Klocker, of Plymouth Hill. “My father was a German. Learned his knifemaking in the village where he was born in the old country, and he taught it to all us kids whether we liked it or not, soon's we got old enough to work. I had to learn it. Hated the goddamn job, and I hated Northfield. We used to live in Bronxville, New York. That's the first place my father worked when he came to this country. And I was fourteen when we moved to Northfield. After livin' in the city, it was pretty dull.

'soon's I was old enough to be independent, I lit out. Went out west and kept a-travelin' for five or six years, workin' at the knifemakin' trade from one shop to another. Worked in shops all through the middle west. That's the way knifemakers used to do, go from one job to another. A pretty restless bunch.

“They stuck close together, too. Had their own union. You couldn't break into the trade unless your old man was a knifemaker. The union had the say, who was going to be taken into the business. I worked up in Northfield time of the strike. We were out for months, I don't remember how long, but it was a long time. I chopped wood for sixty cents a day, to make a little money.

“What was it about? Well, it was the time the government raised the tariff on knives. Prices went up all through the country, and most all the knife companies raised the help five per cent right off the bat, and give 'em another five per cent raise a little later. The Catlins up in Northfield didn't want to give anything. Finally the boys struck. Wanted at least five per cent.

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“I can remember the time them fifteen knifemakers came over from England. The one Catlin hired to break the strike. He didn't tell 'em there was a strike goin' on, but they got suspicious.

“Catlin had a boarding house all fixed up for 'em. Had Old Lady Wildgoose come down from Torrington to do the cookin' and everything. Night they came to the 2 village me and Tom Hawley was walkin' down the hill and we met Charley Gustafson and his team, bringin, 'em up.

“‘What you got there, Charley?’ I says. “‘Got some knifemakers,’ says Charley, ‘right from the old country.’

“‘Well, there was a fella named Jim Williams, one of the johnny bulls, he hollers out to me, ‘Is everything all [reet?] up there, lad?’ He talked that low English. I says, ‘No, by God, it isn't. We're on strike,’ I says.

“They went on up the hill to the boardin' house, but not one of 'em went to work the next day. Catlin was madder'n hell, he wouldn't pay their board and they had to get out. But the knifemakers took care of them, every one of them got a job. They took seven over in Hotchkissville and four down to Cotton Hollow and I think the rest went to work in Southington. You see, the way it was, if you was on strike, like us, you couldn't go out and get a job anywhere else while the strike lasted. None of the other shops would take you. But with those fellas it was different. They hadn't gone to work anywhere.

“My old man made knifemakers out of all of us, me, and my brother Ed and my brother Gus. My brother Gus, if you could talk to him, he was superintendent of the brick shop down on the Waterbury road—Thomaston Knife Company. That's the one Joe Warner owned. But Gus is over in Watertown now. My father worked for Gus at the end. He wouldn't give it up. He was an old man but we couldn't get him to quit. We was always afraid he'd get hurt.

“So Gus tried to discourage him every way he could. He wouldn't give the old man his blades. Let him come to work, and there wouldn't be anything for him to do. His work would lay there on the bench for months, with Gus holdin' it up on him. Finally he see we got the best of him and he quit. ‘Py God.’ he says, ‘if I was a younger man I'd go someblace else and get a chob. My own son,’ he says, ‘I teach him everything he knows, and now he puts me oudt from the shop.’

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“The old man learned his business from those old fellas that did the work in their houses. That's the way they did it over in the old country, you know. I've heard him tell how they used to chisel 'em out with a chisel. The knives you get these days, now. They look fine. But anyone that knows will tell you what they are.

“My father used to make those watch charm knives. Little damn things not more than in inch long. Stoughton took about fifty of them out to the exposition one year and sold them all in less'n a week. Wrote back and asked the old gent for more. Said he could sell all he got.

“I never cared much for the work, but I see a lot of the country because I knew my trade. I could always move on to another town and get a job. But when I got back home after bummin' around for a few years, I give it up. The boys up in Northfield—they used to save up four-five hundred dollars, and then off they'd go. Wouldn't go back to work till it was gone, the ones that were single, and by that time they'd probably be a good many miles from Northfield and never would come back.

“One thing about it, you could always make good money. You could make three-four dollars a day, if you wanted to work, when two dollars was good pay in most of the shops. You could see the way it was goin' years ago, though. Knife shops closin' up all over the country, and new machinery comin' in. What the hell good was the trade to a man? It don't make no difference any more whether you can make a good knife or not—the cheap ones

sell better. Who cares if they're good or not? They ain't got time to fool around with the old fashioned methods. So where would I be if I depended on the knife trade today, to earn a livin'? You said it, m'boy, you said it."